

APPENDIX E. WORD USAGE

AFFECT/EFFECT

Affect is a verb and cannot be used as a noun. Affect means “to alter or to change.” Things can be affected adversely or favorably, but the word itself indicates only “alter” or “change.” Associate affect with alter, since both affect and alter begin with the same letter.

Effect can be used as a verb or a noun. As a verb, it means “accomplish” and is related to “success.” A word beginning with the same letter as the verb “effect” is “execute,” and the meanings are closely related when we think of “executing” as carrying out plans.

Effect as a noun means the immediate result, consequence, impact, or outcome. When using words like “the,” “this,” “these,” “an,” “that,” “those,” “any,” “some,” “such,” “favorable,” and “unfavorable” in front of the problem word, always use the noun, which begins with an “e.”

AMONG/BETWEEN

Use “among” when referring to three or more objects.

Use “between” when referring to two objects.

Examples Are:

What is the difference between concrete and asphalt?

The lottery payoff will be divided among the winning ticket holders.

AMOUNT

Means weight, lump sum, money, etc. (See **NUMBER**)

BIANNUAL/BIENNIAL

BIANNUAL	Occurs twice a year.
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BIENNIAL	Occurs every 2 years.
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BOTH/EACH

BOTH	Means “two considered together.”
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EACH	Means “individual items considered separately.”
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BRING/TAKE

BRING Refers to “action toward the speaker.”

TAKE Refers to “action away from the speaker.”

CAN/MAY

CAN Means “is able to.” (capable of accomplishing)

MAY Means “allowed” (has permission to) and can be used to mean “it is possible that.”

CANNOT

Is the preferred usage in the FHWA as opposed to “can not.”

CAPITAL/CAPITOL

CAPITAL Refers to cities, towns, chief in importance or influence, offenses, punishable by death, sources of wealth or profit, tops of columns, and uppercase letters.

CAPITOL Always refers to a building/edifice.

CITE/SITE

CITE Means to commend or praise, quote, refer to, or call upon formally (as in summon).

SITE Means location (i.e., place, scene, point of something).

CONCUR

Means to agree, approve, or happen together. Use “with” (e.g., with another person about something) or “in” (e.g., in an idea, plan, or opinion).

NOTE: Never use “concur that.”

CONSENSUS

Means “group opinion” NOTE: Never use “consensus of opinion.”

CONSIDERABLE/CONSIDERABLY

CONSIDERABLE Is an adjective which means “large, important, significant.”

CONSIDERABLY Is an adverb which means “increased.”

E.G., I.E.

Don’t confuse the use of e.g. (“for example”) and i.e. (“that is”).

NOTE: When used in a sentence both should have a semicolon before and a comma after:

Employee benefits; i.e., annual leave, sick leave, and retirement plan are shown on the itemized statement.

ENSURE/INSURE/ASSURE

Ensure Means “to make certain.”

Insure Means “to protect against loss.”

Assure Means “to give someone confidence,” the object of this verb should always refer to a person.

EXAMPLES

I want to ensure (make certain) that nothing will go wrong.

I want to assure you (give you confidence) that nothing will go wrong.

I want to insure this necklace (protect it against loss) for \$5,000.

FARTHER/FURTHER

FARTHER Refers to actual distance (physical distance)

FURTHER Refers to figurative distance and means to a greater degree or to a greater extent (time, quantity, and degree)

FEWER/LESS

FEWER Is used to refer to items that can be numbers or counted.

LESS Is used to refer to items that can be weighed or measured and to money.

FOLLOW UP/FOLLOWUP

FOLLOW UP	<i>We will follow up on this issue within 1 month.</i>
FOLLOWUP	As an adjective/unit modifier or as a noun:
Adjective -	<i>A followup review has been scheduled with the Maryland Division Office by the Office of Program Review.</i>
Noun -	<i>The followup was delayed.</i>

IMPLY/INFER

IMPLY	Means to suggest or hint.
INFER	Means to draw a conclusion—assume, deduce.

IN/INTO

IN	Denotes location within (enclosure).
INTO	Denotes motion from the outside to the inside.

NUMBER	Means countable items.
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PERCENT	Spell out percent instead of using the symbol (%) except in tables, footnotes, charts, etc.
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PRACTICAL/PRACTICABLE

PRACTICAL	Means useful, successful, or appropriate.
PRACTICABLE	Refers to something that is feasible or usable but not yet tested/proven.

PRINCIPAL/PRINCIPLE

PRINCIPAL	Refers to an important person or thing (adjective), a sum of money (noun), or an item of utmost importance (adjective).
PRINCIPLE	Refers to a concept, law, doctrine, rule, or code of conduct (noun). Principle is not used as an adjective.

UNIQUE

Refers to something that is distinctively characteristic (one of its kind) or without equal.
Should never be modified with words such as “most” or “more.”

WHICH/WHO/THAT

WHICH	Refers to animals, places, and things or introduces a non-essential phrase or clause.
WHO	Refers to persons but may be used with animals and some things called by name.
THAT	Refers to animals or things and sometimes to persons or introduces a non-essential phrase or clause.

EXAMPLES

The boy who was fishing is my son.
The boy which (or that) sat beside him looked listless.

Sometimes that and who are interchangeable.

A child (that) (who) sucks his thumb is often insecure.
That man (that) (who) sold his business was financially insecure.

NOTE: **WHOSE** (the possessive form of who) is often used to avoid the awkward use of “which” (even in referring to animals, places, and things.)